

A CRITIQUE OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPTION OF INEQUALITY AND IT'S IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

Inequality is still a problem for humanity. This essay seeks to examine, from J. J. Rousseau's perspective, the effects that current inequality has had on social interactions in society. The objective of this article is to demonstrate how inequality served as the foundation for modernity, civilization, and political progress in human society. In light of the fact that every individual is born with unique abilities, we contend that nature itself has created inequalities among people. However, we also contend that people should adopt a variety of strategies to reduce these divides, including the establishment of laws and equal access to opportunities for all. This will shift the threat of inequality in our social relations. We will examine Rousseau's concept of inequality, acknowledging its strengths as well as its shortcomings. Nigeria's experience is used to contextualize the discussion of inequality. The expository analysis that underpins this work gives us the chance to demonstrate the enormous risk that inequality has posed to our society in the context of Rousseau's postulate.

Keyword: Inequality, Social Relations, Rousseau, Gender inequality, Corruption, Private property

Introduction

Inequality has long been a significant issue in human society. Chaos, corruption, greed, poverty, abuse, and the devaluation of people as human beings are the results of this. In light of this, people have begun to reflect on their social environment and wonder what led to the inequality in society. The purpose of this essay is to examine the causes of men inequality and to establish if natural law permits it. Rousseau makes an effort to show that contemporary moral inequality is unnatural and unrelated to the fundamental essence of man. It is produced by an agreement between men. Rousseau contends that in order to evaluate natural law, it is necessary to take into account human nature and how it has changed over time to develop modern man and modern society. In order to accomplish this, he starts in a hypothetical state of nature that existed before society and the rise of reason. Rousseau makes an attempt to speculate or make

an educated guess as to what man might be like in this state, rejecting the biblical story of human creation and evolution. He analyzes the physical and mental traits of man and discovers that he is an animal just like any other, driven by two main motives: pity and self-preservation.

The only thing that really sets man apart from the animals is his perfectibility, which is a feature that is crucial to the process Rousseau, goes on to describe. Man has minimal wants in his natural form, little concept of good and evil, and limited interaction with other people. But he's content nonetheless. In accordance with Rousseau's theory of inequality, which will be examined in this article, social injustice is a function of imperfection and environmental conditions. With regard to him, the wealthy continue to get richer while the poor continue to get poorer. People aren't treated like humans because of inequality, which results from competitiveness, greed, and desire.

The majority of people in society are left behind as a result of inequality because, as Charles Darwin famously put it, "survival of the fittest" dictates; only the strong and capable compete and may even trample on others in order to succeed (Gregory, 2000:223). In order to address the issues of inequality, Rousseau sought to create a political system that permitted the coexistence of free and equal citizens in a society where they were the sole decision-makers. The concern, objective, and objective of this research endeavor are these and other concerns related to inequality in Rousseau.

An analytical methodology will be used in this work. By using this method, terms, notions, and concepts are broken down into comprehensible groups of related concepts (Ukpokolo, 2015:37). This study will investigate the primary issues involved, including inequality, to help with a clearer understanding. Additionally, it will look at various philosophical viewpoints on inequality and clarify when someone is considered equal or unequal. It will address the means Rousseau advised to prevent inequality in society after laying out the fundamentals of inequality. The examination of the work will follow next, and then the conclusion.

The Foundation of Rousseau's Conception of Inequality

Discourse on the foundation of inequality, the argument made by Rousseau is that inequality is ingrained in human societies. Rousseau then asks, "How can humans live freely within society?" (UNHCR, 1991). He bases his ideas on his

understanding of human nature. He holds the view that people have a natural tendency toward goodness and that taking care of oneself appropriately does not preclude concern for the welfare of others, in contrast to some of his predecessors and contemporaries (such as Montesquieu and Thomas Hobbes).

Ball men, in Rousseau's view, are socially equal. He contends that inequality is a result of the artificial construction of a social structure based on private property and an organized labor system, which results in the dominance and exploitation of some individuals by others. He is well-known and has particular viewpoints that others ought to follow. He supports direct democracy, where each individual has an equal obligation to decide on the rules that govern them (UNHCR, 1991). The idea of human rights is strongly supported by Rousseau's ideas. The current idea that persons have unalienable rights, independent of their position in society, is influenced by his insistence on the basic freedom of humans in their unaltered state.

Initially, it appears that Rousseau desires the states to stay as independent of one another as possible since he thinks that reliance is the root of all strife and inequity in general. He didn't trust the intentions of leaders in times of war. In a globalized world marked by mass migration, diaspora populations, and transnational social movements, the UN Refugee Agency asserts that, "Since Rousseau's time until now, the world has changed significantly, and his ideals of internal unity and the independence of states feel outdated" (UNHCR, 1991). Therefore, it is unclear whether Rousseau would have supported the idea of global governance or the creation of organizations.

Humanitarian involvement was not a term that Rousseau foresaw. He does, however, hold firm in the inherent compassion of humankind and in the willingness of people to lessen the pain of others. Rousseau's life and work are still very significant in that regard. The first to attack Rousseau for the justifications for his view of inequality were his fellow intellectuals, particularly Voltaire.

With Rousseau's first discourse having already irritated Voltaire, the second discourse infuriated him. According to Johnson Bill, who cited Voltaire and Barzun, Voltaire said that Rousseau "would like his readers to walk on all four like animals, behaving as savages, and believing them to be creatures of perfection" (Johnston (1946)). Contrary to popular belief, Barzun asserts that

Rousseau wasn't a primitive; in his view, "the model man is the independent farmer, free of superiors and self-governing" (Johnson, 1996). The philosopher's anger for their erstwhile friend (Rousseau) was sparked by this enough to make him. They considered Rousseau's rejection of the comforts and luxuries of a civilized living to be his unforgivable crime.

Philosophical Perspectives on Inequality

The issue of inequality has taken center stage in human consciousness ever since people started reflecting on the social contexts in which they lived. The issue of hierarchy, equality, and inequality arises wherever social activities bring people into contact with one another. In this section, we will examine various intellectuals' viewpoints on inequality while considering both its proponents and detractors. One of the scholars interested in the social contract theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau and how it might be used in modern society is Simon Shaapera.

In his article, "Evaluating the Social Contract Theoretical Ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau: An Analytical Perspective on the State and Relevance to Contemporary Society," he described his theories in great detail. He proposes employing Rousseau's theories to improve current state administration and government. He believes that Rousseau's social contract theory is significant in a variety of ways. It provides the foundation for democracy and the cause for revolution against unjust government, giving rise to the modern referendum and direct popular legislation. (Shaapera, 2014:39-40).

Despite the model that Rousseau's theory reveals, it cannot be argued that it is a full model that individuals or society as a whole should adopt. As the author noted, his political offerings fell short in the area of the unrestricted power of the people's will, which could result in absolutism. Though he claimed that "all men are equal by nature," John Locke claimed that "I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of equality" (Voegelin, 1999:150). He lists a number of factors, including birth, advantages received, excellence of parts and merits, age and virtue, as justifiable causes of disparity in his writings.

Men may not be equal in every way, but they are equal in the protection they receive for that inequality, runs the iron premise running through the entire text (Slomp, 2000:26). In other words, the government will maintain both the affluent and the poor's wealth with divine fairness. The majority rule system of Locke and Rousseau are both compatible. There is a wealth disparity, according to

Locke's notion. This indicates that Rousseau disagrees with some of the levels of inequality in Locke's society. According to Rousseau, moral and political inequality as well as natural or physical disparity should never be tolerated. This topic will be covered in more detail later on.

Woolner is another person who is intrigued by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract idea and how it might be used to improve our society. In an article titled "To What Extent Can Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract and John Berger's be said to show democracy as the best political model for a society?" he shared his thoughts. The democratic theory, according to Woolner, is the finest theoretical model for society since it is consistent with Rousseau's notion of the general will and the sovereign (Woolner, 2009:308). However, Rousseau did not outline a rigid political model that he believes to be ideal in his writings; rather, he outlined fundamental principles that a community must follow.

This causes his work to be interpreted differently by different people. The fact that democracy is predicated on the trust of the people, in Woolner's perspective, is one of the key factors supporting Rousseau's claim that security must be minimal for democracy to function. In a small state, it is feasible to have respectable meetings where everyone is welcome to attend and voice their ideas. Woolner holds the aristocracy to be the ideal form of governance, in contrast to Rousseau, who holds that democracy is the best. The contrast between Rousseau and Woolner's writings is evident in this.

In order to demonstrate its relevance to current concerns of inequality, Fredrick Neuhouser tries to reconstruct Rousseau's philosophical perspective about the legality of social disparity, particularly economic inequality. In the discourse, he concentrated on the causes of inequality, but to fully understand his perspective, concepts from *The Social Contract* must be included.

Rousseau values economic equality only instrumentally as a means of promoting citizens' freedom and securing the social conditions that make satisfactory recognition, an essential component of human well-being, available to all (Neuhouser, 2008:15), according to the author. He claims that Rousseau's position is robustly egalitarian in the sense that it places limits on permissible inequalities in wealth.

In his article "Radical Inequality, "Emphasis on Explanations," James Conyers expresses worry about one major kind of social inequality: racial disparity. He claims that there are three types of racial disparity theories: insufficiency theories, bias theories, and structural discrimination theories (Conyer, 2002:249). With regard to Conyers' definition of social equality, it is the state of having equal access to desirable resources, services, and social positions. The foundation of James Conyers's deficiency thesis is the idea that racial minorities' worsening economic, social, and political status is a result of some sort of defect within the minority groups. According to the bias theory of racial disparity, prejudice and discrimination are the main causes of racial inequality.

Although the structural discrimination theories of racial disparity place the explanation of racial inequality in the structure of society rather than in people's minds, bodies, or sub-cultural groupings (Conyers, 2002:250), Conyers attempted to group several theories under racial inequality, which he views as the single most important form of social inequality. Rousseau, however, rejects inequality and pushes for social equality, which denotes that all people would have access to equal chances in society. This research aims to examine that kind of inequality. Inequality, according to Aristotle, is a type of injustice. He views inequality as being unfair. An unfair person is extremely possessive and greedy, wanting more of the benefits of fortune, such as honor and property, than is justifiable. He also makes a case for gender inequality, saying that while women and children should both be subject to political government; children should be, instead, subject to kingly rule. The explanation for this is that men are by nature better at exercising leadership than women. According to Aristotle, justice is equality, which is true, but only for those who are equal, not for all people. It is also believed that inequality is right, and this is true, but only for those who are unequal (Barnes, 1995:53-54).

Lastly, Nancy Birdsall, who shared this interest in inequality, suggested that inequality is likely to boost growth by concentrating income among the wealthy, which save and invest more and by providing the necessary incentives for people to work hard (Birdsall, 2001:64). If people and nations are concerned about their relative income status, she contends that income inequality is important. Absolute income inequality may annoy people, both those at the low end who may hate the better affluent and those at the high end who may find it harder to enjoy their own wealth if others are clearly worse off. Therefore, lowering inequality might be a goal unto itself for some individuals and in some

cultures (Birdsall, 2001:64). She listed three reasons why inequality is important: The political system is frequently undermined by inequality, which may result in an inadequate social contract. Inequality may also set off faulty economic policies that have negative repercussions on growth, human development, and poverty reduction.

The third reason is that inequality may be detrimental to civic, social, and political life and prevent some types of group decision-making; additionally, it may foster self-justifying tolerance at the societal level, maintaining the status quo of high inequality despite potential negative consequences on the economy and politics (Birdsall, 2001:65). She was able to identify reasons why inequality should be important in our society in her work, which is what her research effort will focus on, rather than looking at the negative repercussions of inequality like others had done.

Critical Evaluation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Conception of Inequality and Its Impact on Contemporary Society

According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, equality only exists in its natural state and that all persons are created equal. (Rousseau, 2007). Still, he said that males are physically and inherently unequal when tracing the roots of inequality. As a result, we are given two interpretations of Rousseau's genuine meaning. How is it possible for a man who was once equal to suddenly become unequal? His first assumption- that men are created equally- is not one we share. Even if they bear some resemblance, all men are inherently different from birth; as a result, their DNA and levels of intelligence quotient (IQ) will differ. They do not think in the same way, and because of this, they are not equal. One of them may be smarter than the other in some way.

The extent to which Rousseau opposes modernity and civilization should also be clarified because, in his writings, he explained inequality by showing how people who were initially healthy, good, and roughly equal to one another turned sickly, evil, intelligent, and highly unequal when they entered society. The extreme inequality of modern society, according to Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, is its greatest evil. In order to escape the state of nature, the human being had the capacity to be flawless, but in the process, he created an imbalance between demands and the incapacity to meet them through civilization (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 1999:219).

Due to the fact that wants had increased due to civilization, people in civil society were unhappy and severely unequal as a result (Gaubas, 2003:45). So, according to Rousseau, society was bad and corrupt. There is a noticeable contrast between the state of nature and the civilisation we currently inhabit. The economist will always claim that human beings have endless demands. Every man naturally seeks knowledge, thus he is constantly interested in learning more. There is no way that man would have become more knowledgeable if he had continued to exist in the state of nature. Men would have undoubtedly come to the realization that they are not equal even if one man hadn't enclosed a portion of land for himself. People should be free to roam around in a free world without regard for their sexual orientation or social standing. More human progress will result from this. However, I continue to support Rousseau's notion of social equality, in which everyone in society is afforded equal opportunity.

Contrary to Rousseau's theory of how inequality came into being, property and society have only served to enhance our quality of life. In its natural condition, man merely needed to eat, sleep, and have sex. However, as civilization and cooperation advanced, men came to have other wants that dictated their life and became them dependent on others. According to Rousseau, this unneeded demand served as the basis for contemporary inequality (Simon, 2014:39). This demonstrates that inequality cannot be completely eliminated from society because it has paved the way for improved living standards, the adoption of laws, and even development. We cannot claim that the natural state is the finest because it did not allow for the evolution of man and did not bring out the best and worst in individuals. Since only change is continuous, human beings must develop. If all men had the same opportunities and living conditions, development would not occur, man would not reach his full potential, and man would not develop. This development will result in the establishment of several social classes. Even the greatest and worst traits in people can be brought out by envy, greed, destitution, poverty, and corruption.

Rousseau makes an effort to show that the present moral inequality that results from a pact between men is artificial and unrelated to the fundamental essence of man. Considering human nature and how it has changed through time to produce contemporary man and modern society are both important, according to Rousseau, in order to evaluate natural law. In order to do this, he starts in an idealized version of nature, which existed before society and the rise of reason.

Rousseau tries to speculate or imagine what man might be like in this stage by ignoring the biblical account of human creation and evolution.

He analyzes the physical and mental traits of man and discovers that he is an animal just like any other, driven by two main motives: pity and self-preservation. His perfectibility, which is the sole genuine characteristic that distinguishes him from the animals and is crucial to the process Rousseau goes on to describe, is the only thing that truly sets him apart. In his natural form, man has few needs, little concept of right and wrong, and no interaction with other people. However, he is content. But the human race is not static. His perfectibility permits him to adapt to his surroundings and be shaped by them. Naturally, factors like earthquakes and floods push people to live everywhere on earth and require them to learn languages and other abilities.

Small groups or societies begin to form when men interact more regularly. As the human intellect starts to mature, man starts to have a variety of new demands as he becomes more socially conscious. While there is a connection between the development of reason and society, this development happens negatively. Pity and self-preservation are replaced by amour-propre (self-love and self-esteem) as men begin to live in groups. This leads men to compare themselves to others and feel that they must control others in order to be happy. Moral inequality first emerged with the creation of property and the division of work. Property enables the wealthy to dominate and take advantage of the underclass.

At first, there is a warlike condition of armed conflict caused by the risky and unstable relationships between the wealthy and the poor. The rich deceive the poor into founding a political group in an effort to end this strife. The underprivileged assume that this development will guarantee their freedom and safety, but in reality, it only solidifies the relations of dominance that already existed, enacting laws that establish inequality. Physical inequality has been replaced by moral disparity, which is now more or less unrelated to the basic character of man. The many stages of society are highlighted in Rousseau's analysis of how it functions.

He views society as becoming increasingly unequal, starting with the deception played by the wealthy, until its final stage, tyranny, or the unjust domination of everyone by one man. Although not inescapable, this development is very likely.

Conflict and authoritarianism are made possible as wealth becomes the measure by which men are judged. The worst form of contemporary society, according to Rousseau, is one where money serves as the sole yardstick of value (Simon, 2014:42). Rousseau's social contract opposes liberalism, which has the individual's individuality at its core and supports collectivism or communitarianism instead.

Such an argument's central claim is that, through a variety of actions, society as a whole usurps a person's capacity to exercise independence or free choice in the context of the social compact. However, this analysis ignores both Rousseau's historical context and the fundamental goal of his writing, which was to explain how a man, who by nature is an individualist, can simultaneously want the security and benefits of living in a civil society and be able to do so without having to give up his freedom.

Additionally, a social contract proposed by the wealthy from a political social order seeks to resolve the terrible conflict in the transition from the state of nature to civil society. The rich are deceiving the poor with this deal. The poor are led to believe that by approving the establishment of a political society, they will be protected and their freedom will be preserved. It serves as a tool to justify inequality and property at the expense of the underprivileged. Rousseau portrays a beautiful natural state and places the entire fault on social structures, the state, education, and cultural organizations. The conversation about inequality has left us with a paradox.

All of our problems are the result of the advancement of civilization; society is to blame. All of our rights to the general will are subject to loopholes, even in the extreme position that Rousseau took. How can we be certain that the collective will always represents the correct and true will? The possibility of absolutism in the community arising from the general will's unfettered authority was hardly recognized by Rousseau. According to a saying, absolute power corrupts completely. According to critics, "to claim that the general will is always the disinterested will of the society for the common good and that, thus, it is always right to grant the phrase when we ask for a solution.

The community's may not always prove to be in the best interests of the whole. There is frequently a significant difference; the latter solely considers the common interest and consists of the sum of individual wills; yet, if the pluses

and minuses of the same wills are subtracted, they cancel one another. Man is an inherently selfish being who can only think about his own interests before moving on. For some people- especially those who are made to give up their rights- it might be, but definitely not for everyone. Any demand for something in return is nullified once freedom is abandoned, along with all rights.

The common good of all men is the general will, yet this idea is precisely what safeguards the individual since in Rousseau's view, the individual and the collective are so entwined that they cannot be separated without going back to the state of nature. Rousseau did acknowledge the existence of specific (private) wills of the individual, however, in the sense that each man has the capacity to have a specific will that is incompatible or even at odds with the general will that he possesses as a citizen (Appadorai, 1974:27). All of the philosophers who examined at the underlying principles of society have felt the need to go all the way back to the state of nature, but none of them have done so. In *The Confessions*, Rousseau claims that his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* is the piece in which his beliefs are most audaciously and boldly expressed (Rousseau, 2007:4). He picks up on the state of nature issue and responds to Hobbes and Locke, who each made the idea the center of their political teachings.

Rousseau rejects Hobbes' description of the state of nature, claiming that Hobbes and others are projecting onto natural man the vices and psychological traits of man already existing in society. Rousseau accepts Hobbes' anti-Aristotelian claim that humans are not by nature political animals. The first section of the painting shows people who have not yet been corrupted by entering society. Contrary to Hobbes' assertion, the state is not a fight of all against all. According to Rousseau, the human person is naturally good in this unadulterated state of nature since he is self-sufficient and nature provides him with what he needs, with his wants never exceeding his requirements (Bloom, 1987:23).

Rousseau thought that man is an immoral, even rather foolish animal in his natural state rather than the magnificent savage that is commonly claimed. Aside from chance encounters that could lead to sex or procreation, he lives alone and rarely relies on women to take care of his children. In order to help in the creation of the social compact, Rousseau concedes that man does not always know what he wants or what is best for him. As a result, he needs the guidance of wisdom and experience in the shape of these institutions. If this is carried out,

public enlightenment results in the union of understanding and will in the social body: the parts are made to function flawlessly together, and the whole is elevated to its highest power.

There must be a lawmaker for this. Rousseau thus presents a figure who is distinct from popular sovereignty and thus neither superior (a master) nor inferior to the community; he works to ascertain the general will through influence and thus by deduction solely motivated by the preservation of individual liberty and freedom. In addition to all of these, we might give man moral liberty, which is the only thing that genuinely makes him the master of himself. Obeying a law that we set for ourselves is liberty, whereas simply following our appetites is slavery.

In fact, Rousseau considers that man will choose the general will in the social contract with the exact same free will that he uses to make individual decisions. Rousseau does not deny the individual the right to free choice. Instincts, intelligence, over stupidity, and irrationality lose out to justice, according to Rousseau, who argues that justice develops through the conception of the civic state. As a result, man forms a civil community or state and learns to respect the freedom of others living in that community, which is self-protective; this moral intelligence man develops is more advantageous to individual freedom and autonomy than his very same (absolute) freedom in the state of nature.

Conclusion

In an effort to create a rational social environment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made an extraordinary attempt to secure individual freedom (Izibili & Ukwamedua, 2010:18). As a result, his philosophy has reached its pinnacle. During the latter, worsening stages of the revolution, many of Rousseau's concepts were put into reality. Given that he was not only concerned with happiness or unity, but also with the vital nature and role of ethics within the conduct of politics, he discovered this. The main objective of the state, for Rousseau, is to liberate the individual from the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies of traditional society and even civil society after the contract. The state is seen as the wellspring of morality, freedom, and community. Hobbes' and Locke's ideas in *The Leviathan* and the two treatises on government are very different from Rousseau's. He made an effort to comprehend human nature, which is equivalent to comprehending man in his unadulterated natural state. He aims to

explain how people have changed over history and how it has affected society now. Initially, Rousseau examines at man as he is in the state of nature.

The two ideas of pity and preservation are what drive man in his natural state, in accordance with Rousseau. Following a natural experience, Rousseau projected that the basis of inequality lay in a social compact between people. Prior to the development of private property, which ushered in inequality and necessitated the establishment of an organized or civil society, his state of nature initially guaranteed the freedom and a pleasant living for the residents. He held the view that the source of injustice and inequality, which ultimately led to a person losing his freedom, was property.

To restore man's freedom and liberty in civil society, Rousseau countered that, property had to be governed by the general will, which was the universal law. For him, participation and people sovereignty were essential components of liberty. He believed that the state and the individual were both sovereign at the same time and that both were essential for the realization of a fair social and political system.

Overall, Rousseau was advocating a straightforward and unrestricted way of life for everyone, one in which there would be no hardships, no war, and no need to be concerned about hunger or suffering. We live in the 21st century in a world full of advancements, thus we have advanced far beyond that. Living a life similar to how it was originally lived in the state of nature will not work in our current society. So, in addition to facilitating a higher level of life, property and society have also supported human inequality. However, in modern civilizations, inequality results from a process of human evolution that has tainted man's character and subjected him to rules and property, both of which foster a new, unjustified type of inequality known as moral inequality. The theory of Rousseau is still valid. It is still the creator of those objectives that the state can pursue and the only one that can support the continuation of the state.

In order to achieve this, this essay demonstrates that inequality exists in our society and cannot be eliminated because it has prompted the creation of an ordered society through the adoption of laws. To avoid abuse and the bad effects of inequality, it is necessary to lift the burden of cruelty, educate the oppressed, and operate according to human reason rather than our emotions.

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